

A CHARTER

***FOR
BETTER
POLICING
IN
HACKNEY***

Telephone :
01-986 3123

LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY,
TOWN HALL,
MARE STREET,
LONDON E8 1EA

Dear Friends

Hackney Council Police Committee was set up in 1982 to promote the arguments for democratic control and accountability of the police. Although this policy has often been misrepresented and inaccurately portrayed as 'antipolice', the truth is that we are in favour of good policing and against bad policing. We believe that the local ratepayer who pays for policing services should have some say in how he or she is policed which they have in other statutory services such as housing and education through the mechanisms of local government. This is after all the position that exists in other parts of the country which have police authorities. In contrast, although Londoners continue to pay an ever increasing contribution to the running of the Metropolitan police - currently in excess of a third of a billion pounds - the force still remains accountable to no-one but the Home Secretary. Hackney Council firmly believes that this anomaly needs to be corrected.

Although the abolition of the GLC and the dissolution of the LSPU has left a tremendous void in terms of developing policing models and answers appropriate to the needs of Londoners, Hackney Council will continue to do its best to maintain this debate which we believe is essential for the welfare of our residents and meets their many concerns about crime and policing.

We do however recognise that the model of police accountability we desire - the creation of a Londonwide two-tier police authority comprised of locally elected Councillors who would assume the powers and responsibilities that are currently vested in the Home Secretary - is not likely to be implemented until there is a change in thinking at central government level. We believe that a Police Committee like ours has an important role to play. We need to redefine and update the arguments for democratic accountability so as to make ourselves more relevant to the

UD1AAZ

varying needs and demands of the local community. In Hackney we are attempting to set a lead in this by

- (a) developing service-orientated structures through our Police Committee Support Unit which can provide help to our residents in a number of practical ways.
- (b) Seeing our primary role as facilitating face-to-face community - police dialogues to achieve the demands outlined in the Charter. Achieving these demands is going to form the basis of much of our work over the next few years.

We intend to use all the resources and powers at our disposal to ensure that the local police are made aware of and respond effectively to community concerns through whatever liaison structures that can be developed on the basis of an equal partnership. We believe this to be a far more productive form of liaison and accountability that will bring about genuine and lasting improvement in police - community relations than schemes based on an unequal partnership between the police, local authority and the community.

Very many important issues of police training, structure and organisation and the institutional forces that shape police practices and strategies have been deliberately omitted from the Charter. The Charter reflects the demands of the people of Hackney as put to us. We however believe that its contents, the lessons learnt from the Fresh Approach exercise and the attempts we are now making to pioneer a new and practical model of police accountability, albeit in a limited form, are relevant for other local authorities, relevant community and national agencies and not least the police themselves.

Yours faithfully

Cllr. Adrienne Morgan
Chair, Hackney Council Police Committee
May 1988

- * Further details of the Fresh Approach strategy and relevant committee papers can be obtained from the Police Committee Support Unit, London Borough of Hackney, Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8 1EA.
Tel. 01-986 3123 Ext. 278/280.
- ** The Council also encloses the general recommendations of 'Policing in Hackney 1945-1984', the report commissioned by the Roach Family Support Committee and produced by an Independent Committee of Inquiry. We feel that the implementation of these recommendations would go a long way towards achieving better police-community relations in the borough. Committee reports on the Inquiry's findings are available from the above address.

*** HACKNEY COUNCIL POLICE COMMITTEE SUPPORT UNIT

Head - Barbara Roche
Researchers - Umesh Desai and Alex Weeks
Administrative Officer - Janet Libovitch
Secretary - Fay Wiltshire

A CHARTER

FOR BETTER POLICING IN HACKNEY

Hackney Council believes that policing and crime prevention are issues of vital public importance, and that the people of Hackney have a right to a direct say in how they are policed. It recognises that there are many sections of the community who feel they are not getting the service they are entitled to from the police, and that there is scope for greater police/Council co-operation in order to ensure that all residents feel safe and protected.

Hackney Council is committed to lobbying for the type of policing local people *REALLY* want. We are pledged to exploring avenues for liaising with the local police in matters over which the Council has statutory responsibility in order to ensure the police meet local needs as identified by the community.

Based on this principle, Hackney Council launched its "Fresh Approach to Policing in Hackney" in the spring of 1987. Its purpose was to listen to what Hackney people had to say about crime, crime prevention and policing.

During this period a draft charter with ideas for better policing was circulated to stimulate discussion. The draft charter was considered by voluntary groups, tenants and residents associations, youth clubs, community organisations, trade unions and religious bodies all over Hackney. Copies were left in community centres, libraries and Council offices, and members of the public were invited to write in with their comments.

Throughout the Autumn of 1987, a series of public meetings were held in every part of the borough. These were well attended, and the composition of each reflected the multi-racial and multi-cultural population of Hackney. Considerable coverage in the local press meant that a lively debate was provoked.

Local people have given us many constructive ideas about how they want local policing improved and how the Council can help. They have come forward with many problems that needed a hearing. This Charter is an attempt to show that Hackney Council is listening.

THE CHARTER

The demands about policing and crime-prevention which follow, reproduce the views of a wide cross-section of Hackney people as expressed to their Elected Representatives in the course of the Council's "Fresh Approach to Policing" fact-finding exercise...

Local Police, Local Priorities

- Crimes targeted by the local police for special attention should be those that affect us in our everyday lives. There should be greater public participation in decisions about which crimes the police give top priority to.
- Before deciding their priorities, the police ought to publish a comprehensive list of all the groups they have approached for ideas.
- There should be concrete measures for monitoring such priorities.
- Special attempts should be made to reach sections of the local community that are not normally given a voice so that they get the chance to tell the police what is important to them.
- The effort made by the police to find out the views of women on domestic violence has been inadequate. Closer links need to be established with womens groups and the Council's Social Services to learn from their experiences in dealing with domestic violence, rape and sexual assault.
- The police should make crime prevention a higher priority than public order policing.
- Local police should not be taken off Hackney streets to attend to demonstrations in other parts of the country.

- Violent attacks against gay men is a real issue of concern in the local community.
- Burglary, street violence, robbery and racial attacks are of more concern to local people than the policing of soft drugs and dealing with car thefts.
- The police should liaise more closely with the local authority when setting their annual priorities, because with its specialist units, social workers, development officers, housing and leisure departments it has more direct contact with all shades of opinion than any other body in the borough.

Working for Us

- The Council and local police should work together to set up regular Council estate based meetings on policing so that tenants can tell the police what sort of policing is best on their estates.
- There should be a system for channelling the results of estate based meetings into the Council's regular meetings with senior police.
- The community recognises that the Council and the police need to liaise over racial harassment. Local people's experience has been that the police's response has not always been what it should be. The police and the Council's Housing Department need to set up an official, well worked out system for co-ordinating a swift, joint response to racial harassment on estates.
- The Council ought to press the police to make greater use of council resources to bring racist attackers and perpetrators of violence against vulnerable sections of the community to justice instead of simply requesting facilities designed to deal with what the police define as the "hard" end of crime.
- The police should not be selective about which Tenants Associations they choose to work with.

Getting value for money

- Local police should provide regular, written, estate-based reports on crime figure and clear-up rates.
- The police should agree standards of efficiency with local people. One example would be for the police to organise a pilot scheme on some local estates for a trial period, where they will try to respond to certain crimes within a given time limit agreed with tenants.
- The Police should make more effort to keep in touch with people on the progress of investigations into crimes committed against them. A regular 'report-back' system should be negotiated between local police and local communities.
- The Council should set up single-issue crime meetings with local people so that it can use its influence to lobby the local police at its regular meetings with senior police officers.
- Community policing needs to be balanced by community involvement in policing issues. The police must make greater efforts to deal with the increasing numbers of complaints of harassment by the black and ethnic minority communities. The Council must respond to community pressure on this issue to make facilities available for community based groups that have an interest in policing issues.

Protecting our community

- The number of crime prevention officers in the borough should be increased. Two is inadequate.
- Estates should draw up their own crime prevention plans, and the police should agree to respond to these guidelines.
- Local people are angry at being caught in the cross-fire between the police and Council over crime prevention in estate design. Some have said that the

police say they cannot patrol estates because of estate design. The Council has no money to make major structural changes. Hackney people feel their local police should support their local authority in getting more money from central government to improve the safety of estates.

Tackling crime together

- There is a need for a special police squad to deal with racial harassment. Representative groups from black and ethnic minorities should have a key consultative role in deciding what its tactics and priorities should be, and it should be clear that it should not be seen as a substitute for a commitment to the issue by the Metropolitan Police Force as a whole.
- There should be a special police team to deal with domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, with priorities set by local women.
- Police campaigns against drugs should involve full consultation with the local community to ensure it is done in a manner supported by the community.

Beating crime sensitively

- The quality and experience of beat officers needs to be reviewed. Too often popular beat officers are 'rewarded' for their performance by promotion away from direct community involvement.
- Young police officers should not be encouraged to see their promotion chances as solely linked to the amount of arrests they make.
- The police should concentrate their scarce resources on incidents where a real public nuisance is caused. 'Easy' arrests of gay men enjoying public spaces is oppressive and a waste of public money. The Council should not let itself be used in assisting such harassment.

- Forthcoming 'offensive weapon' legislation should not be used by the police to harass black youth in the borough.
- Descending on estates with vanloads of officers to deal with the rowdy behaviour of young people should be replaced by a general low-key presence to deter hooliganism.
- The police should be more careful in how they use their powers under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act. There is concern in the local community that these powers are being used more often against black people than against white people.
- Police pounding the beat should be given more training on the treatment of people with disabilities. People with co-ordination difficulties are too often being wrongly arrested for being "drunk".
- The police ought to draw upon the expertise of the Council and voluntary groups involved in the field of disabilities.

Improving community relations

- The police should not attempt to investigate the immigration status of black and ethnic minority people who go the police to report crimes.
- When lesbians and gay men call upon the police to investigate crimes committed against them, they should not be questioned about their sexuality.
- Police drives against drugs should be directed against the pushers of hard drugs rather than the users of soft ones.
- To maintain public confidence a fully independent police complaints system with comprehensive powers is needed, which does not involve the police investigating themselves.

- There should be well publicised standards set for punishment of individual police officers who are guilty of misdemeanours so that the public are satisfied that justice has been done.
- Police should concentrate on pimps rather than the women forced into prostitution by them.
- Special efforts should be made to provide signers and interpreters for people who are deaf and for people whose first language is not English.

The above wishes of Hackney people will set the agenda for *THEIR* Council's working relationship with *THEIR* Police force in ensuring that everyone in the Borough receives the security and protection they need.

Police Committee Support Unit
Hackney Council Town Hall
Mare Street
London E8 1EA

☎ 986 3123 x278

POLICE
committee
SUPPORT
UNIT
Publication number 5



HACKNEY COUNCIL
Working for local people

Published by the Press and Publicity Unit of Hackney Council. April 1988.